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Recovery Act Speeds Closure of Research Reactor

Lou Evers, a member of the HFBR project team, locks the HFBR door.

"While this is a huge environmental remediation accomplishment, I am still saddened to see HFBR close. I am proud to be part of the team that operated the reactor and now part of the team that put it in its final state of hibernation. For me, it's an era of science that will never be forgotten."

--Lou Evers, a former reactor operator at the HFBR for 20 years and member of the HFBR decommissioning team

UPTON, N.Y. – The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act helped Brookhaven National Laboratory secure a major milestone recently by providing $6 million for cleanup and closure of a research reactor.

The door to the High Flux Beam Reactor (HFBR) is now locked, and the facility will be in a hibernation for up to 65 years. That's the period needed for radiation levels to naturally decay so the reactor may be removed safely using conventional demolition techniques.

"The door is locked, and the lights inside the HFBR are off. The facility is permanently shut down," BNL Environmental Restoration Projects Director Chuck Armitage said.

The Recovery Act funding allowed the Lab to launch the project start date in April 2009 — nine years earlier than planned. Work on stabilizing the reactor had previously been slated to start in 2018.

In another significant milestone, the HFBR closure is part of Recovery Act work at the Lab that, once complete, will end Office of Environmental Management legacy cleanup activities at the Lab.

The speedy, successful closure was made possible by hiring new workers and creating and saving jobs through the Recovery Act. According to FederalReporting.gov, a government-wide data collection system, 112 full-time equivalent employees funded by the Recovery Act work at the Lab between April and June 2010.

The HFBR, which operated from 1965 to 1996, was one of the world's premier research reactors, providing neutrons for materials science, chemistry, biology, and physics experiments.

The reactor cleanup included removal of contaminated underground utilities and piping and preparation the reactor confinement building for long-term, safe storage. During the hibernation, the Lab will monitor the HFBR regularly to ensure it's in a safe state.

The $21 million project to stabilize the reactor included $6 million in Recovery Act funds and $15 million in the Lab's budgeted Office of Environmental Management funds.

The HFBR complex is shown here. Its most recognizable features are the domed reactor confinement building, lower left, and the distinctive red-and-white stack, upper right.

For more information about the Brookhaven National Laboratory, please visit http://www.bnl.gov.

For more information on EM Recovery Act, visit www.em.doe.gov/emrecovery.